**Current Challenges to Multinational Federalism in India**

**Abstract**

India's multinational federation has experienced multiple challenges in the last 25 years, relating to the rise of coalition politics and the process of economic liberalisation, both of which have increased the power of some of the states of the federation at the expense of others. The internal borders of India continue to be restructured, with the latest state, Telangana, created in 2014. India is often seen as a successful multinational federation but it is important to recognise the limitations of this success, as well as the areas where the rise of an aggressive Hindu nationalism poses a powerful threat to India's multinational federal democracy.

**Introduction: Current Challenges to Multinational Federalism in India[i]**

Somewhat surprisingly, there have been only three articles on India, the world's largest federation (by population) in *Regional and Federal Studies* - by Bakke (2009), Bhattacharyya (2015) and Mahapatra (2017). India did additionally feature in a wider analysis of Commonwealth federations (Watts 2003), as an ethnofederation in Roeder (2009) and as an example of miscoding in an analysis of Riker's work (McKay 2004). Wilfried Swenden also published a review article on federalism in South Asia (2012). This lack of attention to Indian federalism in this journal is all the more surprising because the multinational character of the Indian federation and the influence of its structures on managing identity conflicts are well-established (Kohli 1997, Manor 1998, Adeney 2007, Bhattacharyya 2007 and 2010; Stepan, Linz et al. 2011, Shneiderman and Tillin 2015). We can only guess at the reason for this omission. One possible reason is that, with the exception of a few scholars, India is not seen as an example that has relevance for the study of other federations either because of its extreme diversity (with an effective number of linguistic groups (ENLG) of 8.5 at the time of independence) or because it is situated within the developing world and thus 'western' political concepts are not seen as applicable.[ii] Another explanation could be that India's federation has been traditionally criticised for being too centralised, with some calling it a quasi federation (Wheare 1963, Riker 1964) because of the constitutional provisions concerning emergency rule[iii] and the ability of the centre to change unilaterally state boundaries and create or disintegrate states under Article 3 of the Indian Constitution. It may also be explained by the targeting of more disciplinary or area studies journals by authors working on the country.

The nature of this multinational federalism and the challenges it faces are discussed in more detail below. However, given the changes in India over the last 25 years or so, many of the effects of which are still to be understood, and the constant restructuring of its internal borders, the time is ripe for a special section of *Regional and Federal Studies* focusing on the nature of this multinational federation, its real achievements in the promotion of a multinational democracy as well as areas where this democracy has been potentially threatened by multinational federalism.

**Multinational Federalism**

The concept of a multinational federation, as distinguished from mono-national ones, usually requires that 'the boundaries of the internal units are … drawn in such a way that at least some of them are controlled by national or ethnic minorities' (McGarry and O'Leary 2003: 3). In Asia, the countries of India, Nepal, Pakistan and Malaysia are multinational federations (Adeney 2007, Bakar 2007, Bhattacharyya 2010, Malagodi 2013), although not all groups in these countries possess their own state(s). These multinational federations contrast with

> … national federations [which] may be nationally or ethnically homogeneous (or predominantly so), or they are organized, often consciously, so as not to recognize more than one official nationality – often this happens in such a way that the state's national and ethnic minorities are also minorities in each of the constituent units (McGarry and O'Leary 2003: 3).

The United States is an example of such a mono-national federation; its social and cultural mosaic is quite diverse but this is not reflected in its territorial arrangements (Seymour and Gagnon 2012). This definition of a multinational federation is more limited, however, than the criteria proposed by Richard Simeon for a wider consideration of 'territorial pluralism.' This definition not only provides for 'self-government but also, frequently, for equitable forms of recognition and power-sharing arrangements within central or federal governments' (2015, 3).

The above distinction between multinational and national federations raises, first of all, the question of what is the nation that may or may not be recognised within federal structures and what is its relationship to the state or wider national identity? The theoretical literature on nations and nationalism is rich and diverse.  The definition of a 'nation' is contested. The late Walker Connor defined nations as 'self-defining ethnic group[s]' (1978). However, this ignores, as Sami Zubaida has argued, the possibility of civic nations, nations that are not defined on the basis of ethnicity, but are (ostensibly) more inclusive (1989).  If we think of a 'high' definition of the nation, such as that expounded by Max Weber, then a nation is a 'community of sentiments which adequately manifest itself in a state of its own; hence a nation is a community which normally tends to produce a state of its own' (Gerth and Mills 1948: 176). This

definition is not in quarrel with Benedict Anderson's famous definition of the nation as an 'imagined political community' for whom a (nation-) state is a possibility (1983: 13). Ernest Gellner's definition of the nation suggests that the people must 'share the same culture, when culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and way of behaving and communicating' and 'who recognize each other as belonging to the same nation...' (1983). But, as many authors have argued, this culture does not have to be defined along ethnic lines and there are many nations that are multinational (O'Leary 1997). It is important to recognise that nations need not aspire to a state of their own, although much of the literature on nations and nationalism portrays this as 'natural' desire of a nation.

By accepting that self-determination is possible within a multinational state, we can understand how federal institutional structures and arrangements can provide an institutional structure for a state to be home to *many* nations, in a manner which Stepan, Linz and Yadav have described as a 'state-nation' (2011). However, the question as to what defines a homeland in a heterogeneous country such as India is often unclear. Do homelands possess a clear majority of the population belonging to the group that is claiming that homeland? Do they have clear-cut geographical boundaries, and who has the 'rightful' claim to the territory? These questions are not merely academic. The States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) of India defined homogeneity as comprising over 70 percent of the territory in question. This meant that there could be sizeable minorities within that territory, especially considering the large populations of many Indian states (SRC 1955). The existence of a large number of minorities within a particular 'homeland' is particularly perplexing when considering the case of the Bodos, as discussed by Bhattacharyya and Mukherjee in this special section. In addition, *which* groups are conceded the right to a homeland is important. For example, whether the boundaries of the Indian Punjab would be redrawn around a religious or a linguistic group was a thorny issue in its belated reorganisation. Finally, as Kham Hausing argues in his contribution to this section, the definition of a group along particular lines (such as the linguistically defined Telugus) may undermine the claims of those who do not feel affiliation to that identity, or obscure the divisions within that group.

**Multinational federalism in India**

India is one of the world's most diverse countries. In the more recent literature on comparative federalism India is considered as a 'holding together' rather than 'coming together' federation (Stepan 1999) and was officially framed as a 'Union of States.' Despite, or as some would argue, *because of* its extreme diversity (Manor 1996), it has achieved remarkable success in ensuring relatively enduring ethnic peace and political order. The embedded multinational nature of India's federation has ensured that India has successfully promoted and inculcated multiple identities within a single polity (Arora and Verney 1995), although there are limits on the promotion of anti-national opinions such as the prohibition on advocating secession in the 16th Amendment to the Constitution.

The Constitution of 1950 made some concession to the multinational nature of the state – allowing states to adopt the language(s) in which they would operate. This policy ensured that they were allowed to use this language internally within the state. Article 345 of the Indian Constitution states that

> … the Legislature of a State may by law adopt any one or more of the languages in use in the State or Hindi as the official language or languages to be used for all or any official purposes of that State … Provided that, until the Legislature of the State otherwise provides by law, the English language shall continue to be used for those official purposes within the State for which it was being used immediately before the commencement of the Constitution (Government of India 2016).

In terms of communication with the Union (the centre), Article 346 provided that

> The language for the time being authorised for use in the Union for official purposes shall be the official language for communication between one State and another State and between a State and the Union (Government of India 2016).

In the Constitution, both Hindi and English were authorised for use for official purposes (Article 343). This allowed English to remain as a link language. Although this provision was due to lapse after 15 years, it was renewed after violent protests by non-

Hindi speakers, mainly in the southern states of India (Hardgrave 1993). Not only was Hindi not spoken by the majority of the population, as importantly, it was perceived to be inferior to many of the other Indian languages by members of these linguistic groups.[iv] The Constitution of India under Article 344 and 351(1) has provided for nationally recognizing languages and placing them in the Eighth Schedule of the Constriction. So far 22 languages have been scheduled, including Hindi. This recognition of languages is a symbolic recognition of identity in non-territorial terms. In addition, there are scheduled languages that do not have any territorial concentration, e.g. Sanskrit, Santhali and Sindhi.

The federation that eventually took shape was not exactly a 'holding together' federation because the process was complex and the internal boundaries of the country were radically redrawn. The centre had to right-size the territorial unit to correspond with the cultural unit (Callaghy, O'Leary and Lustick 2001). Article 3 of the Constitution, allowing the centre to unilaterally redraw the borders of the states (with the *consultation* but not the *consent* of the state government to be secured, in contrast to the neighbouring state of Pakistan) proved to be a vital instrument securing the flexibility of the Indian state to respond to demands from groups (Menon 1956, Menon 1957, Nayar 1966, Schwartzberg 1985, Bhattacharyya 2010, Sarangi and Pai 2011, Tillin 2013).[v]

Before independence the Indian National Congress was committed to the reorganisation of the internal borders of the country along linguistic lines after independence. It restructured its own party organisation around linguistically dominant communities in 1917, and the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1920 formally recognised the policy. This decision was as much strategic as it was normative. Without cultivating the vernacular linguistic identity, the party could not mobilise mass support. The provincial party units became the substitute for the future states of India, and Pradeep Chhibber has demonstrated how the Congress was based on the different social cleavages in the respective states (1989, 1999: 52-3). As such, it is possible to talk of multiple nations in India, all having their distinctive history and memories; their pride in their language and culture and their sense of belonging to a definite territory. Although many Congress leaders sought to renege from the commitment to create linguistically defined provinces after independence, Jawaharlal Nehru in particular not

being personally persuaded about the wisdom of a reorganisation (Adeney 2002), divisions within the INC and the threat to the hegemony of the party (Adeney 2007, 77-8) eventually led to the establishment of the SRC.

Although its official recommendations in 1955 for the formation of the so-called linguistic states were cautious (the Report recommended a *balanced approach* between language, economic viability and administrative convenience (SRC 1955)), in practice the reorganisations that were undertaken were predominantly on the grounds of language. 16 new states were created in 1956. They were followed by the reorganisation of the states of Bombay (into the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra in 1960) and Punjab (into a smaller Punjab and Haryana in 1966[vi]). The division of the latter was controversial and, as Paul Brass has argued, imperfect (1994: 194). We return to this point below. In general however, in India, as opposed to Pakistan, extending territorial recognition to linguistic groups was compatible with the Indian nation building strategy, ostensibly based on territorial criteria (Adeney 2007). Despite Nehru's concerns and those expressed by academics such as Selig Harrison (1960), most observers argue that linguistic reorganisation has been a success in accommodating the diverse linguistic groups of India: at least those that were territorially concentrated enough to have secured their own state (Adeney 2007, Bhattacharyya 2010). Although some commentators in the 1990s bemoaned the fact that linguistic reorganisation had increased the regionalisation of the party system (India Today 1998), this should be understood as a comment on *political* rather than *federal* instability.

However, as this special section demonstrates, 'ethnofederalism' has had mixed results in different parts of India (see also Adeney 2017). Firstly, in much, although not all, of the 'peripheral' Northeast, there have been counter-ethnic mobilisations against the dominant tribal ethnic group as Bhattacharyya and Mukherjee discuss in their article. Such mobilisation demonstrates the problems that territorial solutions to ethnic claims for recognition in areas of extreme diversity can pose. In other parts of India, ethnic self-rule has had mixed results for different reasons. In the case of Punjab, an imperfect reorganisation and the political machinations of the central government increased rather than decreased ethnic tensions. While the (often) religiously defined political elite has

been effectively accommodated within the new political dispensation, as Gurharpal Singh and Heewon Kim highlight in their article, given their alliance with the BJP, the Akali Dal has had to eschew their demands for more autonomy. To maintain their support base they have had to increase the use of patronage politics at the expense of good governance (although identity based parties are not the only parties to use this strategy within India (Wilkinson 2007), and the strategy failed to return the Akali Dal in power in the 2017 state elections (Singh 2017)). Finally, although linguistic reorganisation must be seen as a success in terms of consolidating state level elite rule and depoliticising linguistic identity, there are examples where alternative narratives of deprivation have been articulated to demand a further reorganisation (such as in Uttarkahand, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh) (Mawdsley 2002, Tillin 2013). The case of Telangana is only the most recent example of this, as Kham Hausing discusses in his article. The different ways in which multinational federalism in India can be questioned are discussed in turn below.

*Minorities within 'ethnic homelands'*

Multinational federations can be a problematic solution for minorities not large enough to demand their own state, or those that are territorially separated from their larger group. Unlike the linguistic reorganisations of the 1950s and 1960s where linguistic identity was relatively easy to marry up with territory, in many of the North Eastern regions (although not all) the correspondence between the cultural boundary and the territorial one was nearly non-existent, causing James Manor to comment that Northeast India was too diverse to be accommodated using federal mechanisms (1998: 33). These high levels of diversity meant that the redrawing of boundaries did not produce particularly homogeneous states and even in cases where one identity was recognised, other identities became more prominent. In keeping with the developmentalist nation building approach of the Indian state (Guyot-Réchard 2013), the SRC made explicit note of the need for a 'well planned programme for the development' of the region (SRC 1955: 194). However, despite the SRC's reservations, the centre sanctioned the creation of the state of Nagaland in 1963 (from Assam) and others have followed (Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh). These reorganisations were based more on the recognition of tribal ethnicity than language. Such a 'tribal' identity often obscured several sub-divisions. Thus the SRC noted that '[r]acially, linguistically and

culturally, even the tribes which are described compendiously under … the Nagas, are in reality different each from the other' (SRC 1955: 194). As an example of this, after the creation of Nagaland – ostensibly a state for the Nagas - the ENLG (a calculation describing the 'effective' number of groups within a territory rather than the absolute number) was over 11, much higher than that for the rest of India.

**Table 1: Demographics of Northeast India.**

| State | Percentage of India's pop. | Percentage of tribal pop. | Effective No. Ling Groups | Effective No. Rel Groups | Largest religious group | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arunachal Pradesh | 0.11 | 68.8 | 3.65 | 3.86 | Christians | 30.26% |
| Assam | 2.58 | 12.4 | 2.37 | 2.01 | Hindus | 61.47% |
| Manipur | 0.22 | 35.1 | 2.34 | 2.81 | Hindus | 41.39% |
| Meghalaya | 0.24 | 86.1 | 2.77 | 1.73 | Christians | 74.59% |
| Mizoram | 0.09 | 94.4 | 1.70 | 1.30 | Christians | 87.16% |
| Nagaland | 0.16 | 86.5 | 11.93 | 1.28 | Christians | 87.93% |
| Sikkim | 0.05 | 20.6 | 2.42 | 2.38 | Hindus | 57.76% |
| Tripura | 0.30 | 31.8 | 1.87 | 1.42 | Hindus | 83.4% |

Notes:
Data on religion taken from Government of India (2011)
Data on language taken from Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities (2014).

Excluding Nagaland as an outlier, the average number of effective linguistic groups within Indian states is less than two (1.98). No state outside the Northeast of India, with the exception of Jammu and Kashmir, has over two effective linguistic groups. The picture is similar in terms of religion; the all India average is 1.73 effective religious groups (ENRG) per state. [vii] The only states outside the Northeast with over two effective religious groups are Kerala and Punjab. Brendan O'Leary (2001) has argued that federations require the dominant community within the territory - the Staatsvolk - to be dominant enough to be magnanimous to minority groups. This argument can also be applied at the state or provincial level; if a territory is too diverse conflict will ensue without additional power sharing mechanisms.

Many groups (such as the Nagas) also cross state boundaries. India's 2011 census report records some 15 Naga tribes in Manipur (5.7 per cent of Manipur's population). The diversity of the Northeast has been increased by colonial era migration into the plantations, migration as a result of the Bangladesh war of independence, as well as

more recent economic migration. These data demonstrate firstly, that the reorganisations of the Northeast have not been effective in ensuring that territorial and ethnic boundaries coincide. But they also demonstrate the difficulty of using ethnofederal reorganisation as an effective strategy to manage ethno-national differences in this area. The nation building strategies that worked in many other parts of India have therefore struggled to find purchase in much of the Northeast. The concession of these demands have often spawned competing claims for further territorial restructuring because of the absence of clear cut divisions between groups and territories, and the very tiny, unviable size of the territories claimed. Conflicting ethnic claims from peoples living in the same territory rooted in demands for recognition and power remain the real challenges to the legitimacy of India as the world's largest democracy.[viii]

They have prompted heavy-handed security responses (Vajpeyi 2009) coupled with bipartite and tripartite 'ethnic peace accords' after protracted negotiations with the ethnic rebels. Some of these claims have been accommodated through asymmetrical autonomy arrangements such as those in Mizoram and Tripura (Bhattacharyya and Nossiter 1988, Tillin 2007, Bhattachaaryya 2018). But they have failed to do so in other states where groups are intermixed (witness the continuing conflict in Bodoland in Assam) or when a group within an existing state demands more than a sub-state solution (the Garos in Meghalaya, the Gorkhas in West Bengal and the Kukis in Assam). Many of these are of long standing duration.

It is thus possible to argue that the *greatest possible homogeneity* in the local titular nationality when armed with relative autonomy is the best guarantee for ethnic peace (Adeney 2017; Deiwiks 2011: 5). That, after the creation of Mizoram (ENLG 1.70, ENRG 1.3), insurgency has considerably dissipated compared to Nagaland (ENLG 11.93, ENRG 1.28), Manipur (ENLG 2.34, ENRG 2.81), and Meghalaya (ENLG 2.77, ENRG 1.73) supports this. When it is not possible to achieve this level of homogeneity, then other more localised power sharing measures are necessary, as the article by Bhattacharyya and Mukherjee argues. Whether these are possible to achieve within the majoritarian system of India is, however, questionable.

*Marginalised groups*

Although concerns over the limitations of ethnofederalism as an all encompassing strategy have been most loudly articulated in relation to the Northeastern states, as Brass (1994) and Steven Wilkinson (2000) remind us, there are many states where the linguistic minorities are not in a position to argue for their own state, such as Urdu speakers in the northern Hindi states. In these situations, additional arrangements need to be considered. The Indian constitution makes provision for these linguistic minorities. The Constitution of India (Government of India 2016) under Article 29: the 'protection of interests of minorities' (as fundamental rights) states that:

> Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.

It further provides that

> No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.

And that

> All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

However, the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities has made clear (2014) that these constitutional protections are weak and often honoured more in the breach than in the observance. Statehood in India has generally benefitted the dominant groups of the particular state to the relative exclusion of the marginalised. An example of this are the longstanding aspirations and demands of the territorially concentrated Telangana Telugus. They have articulated grievances against their discrimination and domination by their ethno linguistic kin group located in more prosperous regions. At the time of the creation of the state of Andhra Pradesh concerns were raised by the Telangana region, with a historical memory of being politically separate, about their political

domination by the coastal Andhra and Rayalseema regions. A 'Gentlemen's' power sharing agreement was put in place, including guarantees concerning development expenditure. Unfortunately, as Kham Hausing demonstrates in this special section, the arrangement was 'observed more in the breach than the observance.'

Kham Hausing's paper confirms the point made by Bhattacharyya and Mukherjee in this special section that ethnofederal solutions can be problematic and that additional safeguards may be required to manage sub-state diversity. Many of these can also mitigate the majoritarianism of the Indian federal structures, but, as they warn, others can, as in the case of the Bodoland Territorial Council, increase tensions, and lead to conflicts with other groups in the region. Although the special status of Jammu & Kashmir is often referred to in discussions of Indian federalism, the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution[ix] provides for an asymmetrical relationship of '[t]erritorialized regimes of positive discrimination for certain groups … creat[ing] a set of cascading 'autonomous' institutions below the level of the state' (Shneiderman and Tillin 2015: 14). The creation of tribal district councils/regional councils in several, although not all the states of the Northeast, were designed to enable the self-governance of the tribal areas and include legislative powers in respect of certain areas affecting tribal life. These have been successful in Mizoram and Tripura, with lower levels of overlapping diversity, but unsuccessful in more diverse Assam (Saikia 2015). Their analysis has implications for the redrawing of boundaries around ethnic groups in diverse regions as well as the efficacy of majoritarianism as a political principle of governance in such a complex multiethnic mosaic.

*The Periphery*

Other areas where the success of multinational federalism in India must be questioned includes areas where levels of violence have been higher. This includes many of the states of the Northeast but also the states of Punjab and Kashmir. Singh (2000), Wilkinson (2008) and Katharine Adeney (2007) have separately argued that the Indian state adopted different strategies of managing the areas where non-Hindu majorities resided, partially, but not only, because of their geographical proximity to land borders in a security conscious part of the world (e.g. the use of pellet guns, deployed in Kashmir since the summer of 2016, is difficult to imagine in other states of India

(Adeney 2017: 140-1)). These border regions often possess a population that differs from the so-called Hindu 'Staatsvolk' – comprising approximately 80 percent of the population of India. Although Hindus are divided by caste, region and language, some, such as Singh (2000), have argued that the Indian multinational federal democracy operates as an ethnic democracy along religious lines. Singh points to the fact that the border regions, where the majority of religious minorities reside, are viewed with suspicion. These regions have witnessed higher levels of violence than other states. This violence has dwarfed the well-publicised Maoist violence in what is called India's 'red corridor', and previously considered the greatest security threat to India.

The advent of coalition politics at the national level has gone hand in hand with the rise of Hindu nationalism as a political force (Jaffrelot 2009) As a political force the BJP and its affiliates have traditionally advocated a unitary concept of the Indian nation. However, in practice, it revealed itself to be more accommodating of regionalist demands, adapting to the logic of coalition politics before its main national rival, the Indian National Congress (Adeney 2005). As well as making alliances with regional and caste based political parties it has also made alliances with regionalist political parties in Punjab and Kashmir (Kailash 2014). In this special section Singh and Kim analyse the paradoxical case of Punjab, site of a Sikh secessionist campaign in the 1980s and 1990s, but where the Sikh political party is now a coalition partner of the centralist Hindu Nationalist BJP. They use the example of Punjab to argue that while India may be accommodationist along linguistic lines (although the limitations of this strategy are made clear by other contributions to this special section), India is best understood as an 'ethnic democracy' in relation to religious identities. They argue that while ethnofederalism as a strategy may have worked in the 'mainland', the strategy in the peripheries has been 'hegemonic control'. In an important addition to the ethnic democracy debate, they argue that the abandonment of the ethno-national agenda by the Sikh political party, the Akali Dal has required them to adopt more populist measures to maintain their support, at the expense of good government in the state. However, this development has not been unique to Punjab, indeed, it could be said that the linguistic reorganisation of the country created the conditions for patronage politics to emerge (Wyatt 2009).

**Conclusion: Challenges to multinational federalism in India**

All the articles in this special section reveal the importance of looking at the sub-state level in understanding the nature of the Indian multinational federation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The papers have deconstructed any stereotypical understanding of Indian multinational federalism in which *all* ethnic conflicts are considered resolved. The situation on the ground is not as satisfactory. In addition, as the papers in this special section set out, the post-1990s mode of accommodation is different. The major challenges relate to coalition politics and economic liberalisation, which have led to the rise of economically more powerful states (known as 'forward states') with equally powerful chief ministers at their helms. This has strengthened the power of the larger, mainly linguistically defined states, but at the expense of the smaller states, such as those in the Northeast – already on the periphery of India due to their geographical location and small population size.

With the decline of the Congress as the one dominant party and the rise of coalition politics at the Centre, a different route to accommodation of ethno-regional identity was cultivated in terms of coalition agreements with many regional and state-based parties. The two major coalitions, though with vastly different ideological orientations but similar stance on reforms, have alternated in power – the United Progressive Alliance led by the Congress (2004-08) (Centre-Left) and the National Democratic Alliance (Centre-Right) led by the BJP (1996, 1998-2004; 2014-). The intra-party accommodation of the Congress-era had been replaced by inter-party accommodation of diversity via the route of broad based coalition governments. However, representatives from the Northeast of the country have minimal importance in coalition politics given the small number of seats returned from the region.

At the same time economic liberalisation poses new challenges. Because of their poor infrastructure, the Northeastern states have a seriously reduced ability to secure foreign direct investment. These challenges are likely to be exacerbated given the abolition of the Planning Commission in 2014 in favour of the National Institution for Transforming India. (NITI Aayog) (Swenden and Saxena 2017). The abolition of the Planning Commission means that the special financial support given to the states in the Northeast has been automatically withdrawn. The removal of the Special Category Status of these states who received (favourable) asymmetric financial treatment from the Centre has

raised concerns among the elite of the region. Historically, about 80 percent of the region's revenue came from the centre, 90 percent of which was in grants rather than loans.[x] These grants have enabled many of the states in the region to perform well in terms of Human Development Indicators. The removal of this assistance has not only raised questions about the future financing of the region but may also impact on the allocation of resources to the sub-state autonomous bodies, with a potential increase in ethnic conflict between groups.

The arguments presented in this special section give credence to the analysis of those who argue that, while ethnofederalism may not be the state breaker that it is often portrayed to be e.g. by Philip Roeder (2009), the majoritarian principle of winner takes all may need to be qualified (McGarry and O'Leary 2009, Cederman, Hug et al. 2015, Adeney 2017) through more appropriate power sharing mechanisms. The analysis presented here draws our attention to the importance of considering power sharing, along both territorial and non-territorial lines within the federal units (as well as at the centre) so that the inevitable 'others' within that unit do not feel excluded. Such accommodation may alleviate the demands for future territorial restructuring of the Indian federation (for example the state of Gorkhaland from West Bengal or the Garos in Meghalaya). Even if it does not, it provides a platform for these demands within the constitutional process. Whether this is possible within India's winner takes all' electoral system, is, however, debatable.

However, since the rise of the BJP to power in the Centre in 2014 there has been an apparent move in favour of what is styled as 'competitive and co-operative federalism', and a renewed emphasis on a unitary concept of the nation, *a la* Hindutva, de-emphasis on recognition of ethnic identity, and political centralisation. Although the BJP secured a majority of seats in the 2014 election, only 31 percent of the electorate voted for the party. Despite this, the linguistic bargain of the 1960s is coming under pressure (Adeney 2015). Cultural and political pluralism, the *elan vitae* of the political construction of the national identity of India, is under threat from a Hindutva theory of the nation, which seeks to privilege the so-called Hindus at the cost of the millions of non-Hindus (the Muslims, the Christians, the Sikhs and others) (Jaffrelot 2016: 16-23). Should this trend continue, the politics of Hindu nationalism would not only challenge the religious minorities within India, including the Sikhs, but the multiple linguistic

groups too. Hindu nationalism is clearly a great threat to Indian multinational federalism. Although we have demonstrated that these groups are far from homogeneous, the prioritisation of the Hindi-speaking northern and western states within an Indian national identity may be a bad omen for India's territorial integrity and national identity, thus far based on pluralism and multiculturalism.

## Acknowledgements

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[i]We would like to thank Dishil Shrimankar for research assistance on this article.

[ii]In a recent chapter, Bhattacharyya (2007) has argued that the Western concept of federalism has been adapted to Indian conditions so that federalism in India remains a *hybrid* product.

[iii] After the Indian Supreme Court judgment in 1994 (S R Bommai vs. the Union of India) this power of the Centre has been much circumscribed.

[iv]Other concessions were made to the multinational nature of the Indian polity, such as the retention of Personal Laws for Muslims and Christians and the reservation of seats (and positions in public services) for Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies and the local self-government bodies.

[v]Paul Brass (1994) has identified *four informal rules* which the Union government has more or less adhered to: no demand for a political recognition of a religious group will be considered; no explicitly secessionist demand will be tolerated; no capricious concessions will be made to any political demand of any group; and there must be demonstrable popular support of the claim from both sides in conflict for a territorial unit within the federation.

[vi] The UT of Chandigarh was also created, and some territory transferred to the UT of Himachel Pradesh.

[vii] These data exclude Jammu and Kashmir.

[viii] Class conflicts manifest themselves politically (and very violently) in the Maoist movements in the so-called 'red corridor' of India. But they have not been able to challenge the authority of the Indian state. Class conflicts remain marginalised compared to the politics of ethnic conflicts that attract more academic and policy attention.

[ix] Which comprises Articles 297-320 of the Constitution.
[x] In addition to the eight states of the North-East, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh also enjoyed Special Category Status.